

AD WATCH

Kool: Nu Look or UnKool?

Tobacco control is becoming so fashionable, or possibly infectious, that it is causing some advocates' families and friends to do strange things. Like reading backwards. Fred Moeller, Volunteer Public Issues Coordinator for the Michigan Affiliate of the American Heart Association, reports how his daughter and one of her friends spotted a new billboard ad for the Brown & Williamson cigarette brand Kool, whose copy simply said "Nu Look" (figure 1). At first they thought it was just another in a series which wordplays with the brand name, like "B Kool" in ads that B&W had begun running a few months earlier (figure 2). But imagine their surprise when they realised that backwards, Nu Look spells UnKool, surely exactly opposite of how B&W must want its youngest customers to perceive the brand?

Other tobacco advertising campaigns have prompted speculation that advertisers sometimes use opposites to cause some sort of perverse reassurance to prospective customers. In this theory, for example, subtle reminders of disease or hospitals are said to attract the very people who are most worried that smoking will severely damage their health.

Some years ago a British ad campaign for Marlboro featured an unpopulated desert panorama. Ostensibly this was a reference to the sort of uncluttered, Wild West scenery across which the Marlboro man might like to gallop his horse, emphysema permitting. However, it was interpreted rather differently by one British advertising expert, who saw it as a "post-nuclear landscape". It would appeal subliminally, he said, to young people whose worst fear, most deeply buried in their subcon-

scious minds, was that nuclear war would obliterate the world.

So perhaps hinting at being uncool is exactly what is needed to attract young people desperately seeking a cool image? Thus, the uncool reference (spelt out backwards) may mean that Kool will be seen as the opposite of UnKool—which, of course, is cool. This explanation may be too far-fetched. Perhaps the unusual spelling is designed to reach young people by imitating the creative names seen in pop culture—for example, bands such as XTC, 5ive, B*witched, Boyzone, Xtreme, and INXS, and rappers such as B-Real. Or maybe it's just another example of the sort of American English which so shocks diehard traditionalists from the old country, like socks becoming sox, and through being shortened to thru? Unless B&W documents reveal the true purpose of the ads, we'll never no.

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Figure 1 Nu Look (or UnKool?) billboard for Kool.



Figure 2 Telling kids they can B Kool (be cool) by smoking Kool?